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Great Swamp listed among most polluted

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WASHINGTON—The Interior Department said yesterday that the Great Swamp in New Jersey is one of 10 national wildlife refuges that have chemical contamination serious enough to require immediate attention.

The department, in a survey of the nation's 431 wildlife refuges, said an additional 74 refuges have potential environmental problems that require more monitoring and study before any determination can be reached.

The 10 serious cases, including the existence of a five-acre asbestos dump and two landfills located within the boundaries of the 6,793-acre Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in Morris County, have been previously publicized.

However, the department said its report marked the first systematic national listing of the contamination problems at the wildlife refuges.

The report said the contaminants discovered at some of the nation's wildlife refuges could have "a persistent, adverse impact" on refuge habitats, animal populations and human health and safety.

The report also said that contaminants identified at the affected refuges came from agricultural, industrial and municipal activities, and included pesticides, PCBs, asbestos, selenium from irrigation drainage and heavy metals such as mercury.

Authorities some years ago found an asbestos dump at the Great Swamp that had been used by the National Gypsum Co., a company that manufactured asbestos shingles and insulation.

The company, which shut its Mil-

lington plant in 1975, had permission to use the site when it was privately owned, but stopped dumping the asbestos when the property was added to the refuge, the report said.

The department's report said a thin layer of topsoil was placed over the dump site by the Fish and Wildlife Service, but added that "in places asbestos breaks through the soil." The department said the five-acre asbestos dump is located in the Great Swamp's

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wilderness area, which encompass 3,200 acres of the refuge.

The federal government recently proposed completely banning asbestos, a widely used substance that officials say causes up to 12,000 cancer cases a year in the United States.

According to the report, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently monitoring the asbestos site, and has completed a remedial investigation and study. The report said that efforts to deal with the environmental problem will soon be made public.

The report also said an environmental study was initiated in 1984 at the Rolling Knoll landfill, a dump site within the boundaries of the Great Swamp.

The report said the landfill, used from the 1950s until 1964, is located in a wetland that drains through the Great Swamp and eventually into the Passaic River that provides drinking water to communities downstream.

The report said the site has caused "surface water contamination." It also said exact kinds of materials dumped are unknown, but added that the results of the study and continued monitoring will "provide better insight into the nature and extent of the problems."

The department also said it is in the process of developing a monitoring plan for the Harding landfill, another dump now part of the refuge. While it is believed that only household refuse was buried there, the report said, the site borders on a large natural wetland that drains into the Passaic River.

"Great Survey of Contaminant Issues of Concern on Wildlife Refuges"

Besides the Great Swamp, the department said serious contamination exists at the Kesterson Wildlife Refuge in California where selenium-laden irrigation runoff water has killed or deformed many ducks.

The other wildlife refuges requiring immediate attention were Wheeler in Alabama, Kenai in Alaska, Seal Beach in California, Johnston Atoll in the Pacific Ocean, Crab Orchard in Illinois, Nienigret in Rhode Island and the Eastern Shore and Fisherman Island refuges in Virginia.

The report said the Interior Department is "committed to assuring the environmental integrity of the refuges."

It said coordinated action with local, state and other federal agencies will be undertaken to remedy the problems at the 10 serious sites, and to uncover potential problems at the other 74 sites that may be in jeopardy.

William Horn, an assistant secretary for fish and wildlife and parks, said the report "tried to err on the side of caution" by listing any refuge where there is any sign of contamination.

In addition to the 10 sites, the report said there were 30 refuges where "on-site evidence indicates reason for concern," but requires more study.

At the remainder of the refuges listed, the report said, there was no direct scientific evidence of contamination. However, the report said refuge managers at those sites suspected problems because of adjacent land use practices.

These practices included heavy pesticide use, waste dumping

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